

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

By Bonnie Jernigan

Rumors of Laughter in Current Bay Player's Production

Children love to play the game of "rumors," whispering a story from one player to another, and having the tale change as one person hears it and tells it to the next, until it has completely transformed by the end of the game.

Neil Simon's "Rumors," staged by the Bay Players last weekend, and again this coming Friday through Sunday at the Ellison Center for the Arts, presents an adult version of such transformations, complicated by the concerns of stereotypically neurotic New Yorkers.

The stage is set, so to speak, with an amazing transformation of the Ellison Center recital hall. Wing chairs and coffee tables convert the far end of the hall into a stylish Manhattan townhouse, with the audience practically in the laps of the actors; creating an intimacy that adds spice to mixed nuts who visit the apartment during the evening. Sophisticated landscapes and still lifes by Duxbury artist John Young (currently the rage at Bosc, a new furniture and art gallery in Kingston), lend a touch of classy refinement.



Stephen Doherty and Lisa Driscoll dish out the dirt as Glenn and Cassie Cooper

We never really actually see the main characters around whom all the swirling rumors revolve. Ken and Chris Gorman, (Bill Stambaugh and Stacey Erikson) having been first to arrive at the anniversary party for New York's deputy mayor and his wife, frantically fumble with first-aid for their host, who suffers offstage after apparently attempting, and failing, to shoot himself. The hostess is nowhere to be seen, and as his host's attorney, Gorman is concerned with covering up any illusion of a suicide attempt. Stambaugh adeptly comes across with just the right level of comic caginess. As his curvaceous blonde wife, Erikson is appropriately crazed and confused.

Next on the scene are Lenny and Claire Ganz (Bern Budd and Jean Cohen). With no maid, no butler, no food and no guests of honor on the scene, it's hard to sweep the scandal under the pricey Oriental rug, but Ganz is initially more concerned with having just smashed up his new BMW than with best friend's absence at his own anniversary party. Budd is amusingly off center with his whip-lash walk, and Cohen's deadpan delivery is right on target.

Left to themselves, the Lenny and Claire scheme and muse, with the plot thickening as rumors of dalliances and affairs get added to the simmering soup of confusion. Soon, food

show star Cookie Cusak (Chris Bailey) and her psychiatrist husband Ernie (Mike Pevzner) come along to stir up the craziness even more. Bailey and Pevzner strike a balanced dramatic pas de deux, with her hysterical howling and his obsequious acquiescence

Back pain notwithstanding, Cookie gets duped into heading up the kitchen crew so the missing party meal can be prepared, leaving the living room empty and the stage cleared for the entrance of the Glenn and Cassie Cooper (Stephen Doherty and Lisa Driscoll). He's running for state senate, and she is suspicious, self-absorbed and pregnant. Fortuitously, Driscoll is also expecting a child, and her talent is as big as her belly in her delightfully witchy performance. She and Driscoll were previously paired in the Bay Players' production of "Harvey;" together, they have a great onstage chemistry.

Indeed, the pairings of each comic couple, along with the perfect pacing from the entire cast, make this a play that shouldn't be missed. It all gets pulled together at the end by Dawn Schuster and Eric Skarpac, acting as the cops sent to investigate reports of gunshots heard by the neighbors.

There's truth to the rumor that Bay Players are presenting an evening full of laughs. "Rumors" runs again this weekend, with 8 pm shows on Friday and Saturday. Without reservation, I can recommend that you phone 1-800-298-6825 and make *your* reservations now. Once the rumor starts to spread, it could be standing room only at the Ellison Center.